CHAPTER XLIX

JOFFRE

A CHANGE in the military leadership of France caused a change not in the strategy, but in the particular French villages where the same old strategy was to be practised. When I came into power Joffre was visibly tottering to his fall. For two and a half years he had been the virtual dictator of France. Governments carried out, or rather provided him with the means of carrying out the decrees he issued from Headquarters. He tolerated no civilian interference or suggestion as to his methods of conducting the War. A threat to resign on his part quelled doubting politicians or journalists and silenced all grumblers. His attitude towards changing Governments was that their sole business in war was to furnish men, munitions, and supplies to enable him to carry through such military dispositions as he, the Commander-in-Chief, ordered. Their functions ended at that point. As the whole strength of France was concentrated on the struggle with the invader, Joffre practically ruled the country. His insolent treatment of the men who warned him in time of the coming attack at Verdun shook his power, and his throne became more and more rickety. The disappointment caused by the sanguinary failure of the Somme to achieve its avowed purpose further weakened his authority. His neglect to make any

Dictator of France